



safety hints for water skiing



STATE OF CALIFORNIA
THE RESOURCES AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF BOATING AND WATERWAYS

Gray Davis
State of California

Mary D. Nichols
Secretary for Resources

Raynor Tsuneyoshi, Director
Department of Boating & Waterways

Water Ski Safety

As a team, the boat operator, skier, and observer need to learn safe skiing skills. Before your team hits the water, know your equipment, teamwork, boating laws, and the fundamentals of the sport.

The Skier

Be alert for cross-wakes, partially submerged objects, swimmers, rafters, or anything that might come between you and the boat. It is required by law that you wear a Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device designed for water-skiing at all times. It will allow you to rest in the water while waiting for the boat, it protects the rib cage and cushions falls, and its bright color will help others in the area to spot you. Ski belts are not Coast Guard-approved and do not offer positive protection to a fallen or unconscious skier.

If you are going to fall, relax! Try to make a smooth water entry. Never fall forward over the top of your skis. You can stop suddenly by sitting to the back of the skis and dragging your hands. After you have fallen, hold one ski out of the water in an upright position to warn approaching boats.

Skiing in cold water or weather increases your susceptibility to hypothermia. Special precautions, such as wearing a wet suit, should be taken.

The Boat Operator

Before pulling up the skier, double check the path ahead for obstacles and make sure the towline is not caught in the propeller or wrapped around the skier. Never accelerate until the skier is holding the towline handle, with the ski tip or tips showing above water and in front, and signals "hit it."

It is important for skiers to have a smooth acceleration as they come up on a plane. As the operator, you should ease the throttle at first with a slight increase in speed.

Never attempt sharp turns with the boat, especially if the skier is cutting sharply outside the wake on either side. If an approaching obstacle forces you into an unexpected turn, throttle back as you turn. Signal the turn to the skier, remembering that it is better to dunk the skier than risk an accident.

When a skier falls, return without delay. Other boaters may not easily see a skier in the water, and the presence of the tow boat may keep other boaters away from the general area. Since a large percentage of serious water-ski injury accidents are a result of improper operation by the driver during skier pickup, approach with caution from the driver's side so the skier is always in view and on your side of the boat. NEVER back the boat up to a person in the water. **The engine should be shut off when you are near the skier so there is no danger from the propeller.** Remember, when boat engines idle, even in neutral, the propeller may still turn and injure the unwary skier or entangle and cut the towlines. If a skier falls and is injured, it is wise to proceed with caution. Any injury may be aggravated by pulling the person aboard. Get into the water to support the skier until the nature of the injury is known.

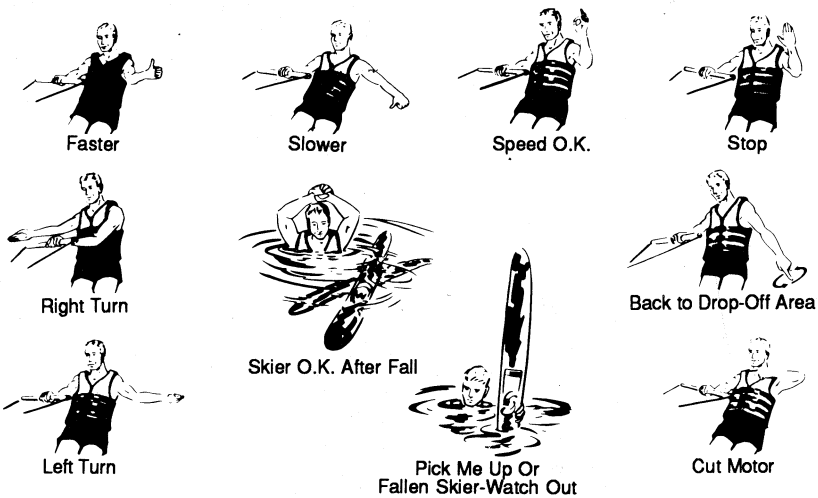
The rules of the road do not provide any special privileges for vessels towing skiers.

The Observer

In addition to relaying the skier's and operator's signals, the observer is responsible for watching the skier at **all times**. Having an observer on board allows the driver to give full attention to the variety of tasks necessary for safe motorboat operation. Statewide boating accident statistics indicate an alarming increase in water-ski accidents resulting from improper lookout.

Signaling

The illustrated signals, approved by the American Water Ski Association, are recommended for use on California waters. Others include START: Shout "hit it" or nod head. JUMP: Raise hand up sharply, imitating a jumping arc. SLOW: Palm-down motion. FAST: Palm-up motion. RETURN: Pat crown of head with open palm.



Speed Limits

The boat operator should judge the speed according to the skier's ability. A good speed for beginners, depending on weight and ski size, is 18-25 miles per hour. Boat speeds are limited by law under certain conditions. The maximum speed for boats is five miles per hour within 100 feet of a swimmer, and within 200 feet of a bathing beach frequented by swimmers, a swimming float, a diving platform or life line, or a passenger landing in use. Boats towing skiers must follow all speed limits.

The Law

No persons under 16 years of age may operate a motorboat of more than 15 horsepower. The law allows persons 12-15 years of age to operate motorboats of more than 15 horsepower if supervised on board by a person at least 18 years of age.

California law requires there to be at least two persons aboard a boat towing a water skier: the operator, and an observer 12 years of age or older. The towing of water skiers from sunset to sunrise is prohibited by state law. Local laws may also restrict skiing at certain times during the day and in certain areas.

Boaters who see a red flag should be on the lookout for a skier in the water.



Water skis should not be operated in a manner to endanger safety of persons or property. Passing the towline over another vessel or skier, or navigating between a vessel and its tow is also prohibited by law. Towing a skier does not give the operator of the vessel any special privileges. The rules of the road must be observed.

Effective January 1, 2001, California law provides that any person being towed behind a vessel must wear a Type I, II, III, or V Coast Guard-approved life jacket. Exceptions: The law does not apply to performers engaged in professional exhibitions, official regattas, marine parades, or tournaments. Any person engaged in slalom skiing on a marked course, or barefoot, jump or trick water skiing, may instead wear a wetsuit designed for the activity and labeled by the manufacturer as a water ski wetsuit. However, for each skier who elects to wear a wetsuit, a Type I, II, III, or V life jacket still must be carried on board. Note: Inflatable personal flotation devices are not approved for use while water skiing.

Persons using any underwater maneuvering device are exempt from wearing a life jacket. An underwater maneuvering device is any towed or self-powered apparatus designed for underwater use that a person can pilot through diving, turning and surfacing maneuvers.

Under California Boating Law, the display of a ski flag is mandatory to indicate a downed skier; a skier getting ready to ski; or a ski, line, or similar equipment in the immediate area. The display of the ski flag does not in itself restrict the use of the water, but when operating in the area, boaters should exercise caution.

Alcohol plays a significant role in serious boating accidents and fatalities. It is unlawful to water ski or operate a boat under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Your Equipment

Make sure your equipment is in safe, serviceable condition. Foot bindings should be secure and free of sharp or protruding surfaces. Skis made of wood should be free of splinters or cracks in lamination. Check your towline (handles, lines, and connecting hooks) for strength every season. Attach towlines only to proper fittings on the boat. Many skiers have been seriously injured in accidents with the tow boat or ski equipment. A moving towline can cut like a knife. For this reason, towlines should be of equal length when more than one person is skiing.

Where to Ski

Minimize the danger of collisions with other boats, other skiers, or fixed objects by staying out of congested areas and well-traveled traffic lanes. Avoid skiing close to shore, around bends or in shallow water. Stay out of fishing areas. It is best to "scout" your area before you ski.

BOATING SAFETY CLASSES explaining required and recommended equipment for small boats and offering training in good seamanship are conducted throughout California by the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, the U.S. Power Squadrons and certain chapters of the American Red Cross. For information on Coast Guard Auxiliary and Power Squadron classes, call (800) SEA-SKIL (732-7545) or (800) 368-5647. The Department of Boating and Waterways offers a free home study course entitled *California Boating, A Course for Safe Boating*. For more information, e-mail us at pubinfo@dbw.ca.gov, or phone (916) 263-1331 or tollfree (888) 326-2822, or write: Department of Boating and Waterways, 2000 Evergreen Street, Suite 100, Sacramento, California 95815-3888. Visit our Website at www.dbw.ca.gov.